



**What Special Education Teachers Want  
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to Know**

**Transition Services Liaison Project**

# Special Thank You To:

- ♦ **South Dakota Office of Educational Services and Support, Special Education Programs**
  - ♦ **Special education teachers in the North Central region of South Dakota who provided comments to be used in this handbook**
  - ♦ **South Dakota Advocacy Services**
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South Dakota Division of Rehabilitation Services Portfolio to Employment

South Dakota Special Education website <http://doe.sd.gov/oess/specialed/index.asp>

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)

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# **Introduction**

This booklet was created to help Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors and special education teachers to better understand each other's perspectives and roles. Both educators and Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) personnel strive to obtain the best possible outcomes for students with disabilities. The relationship between the two agencies (VR and school) is significant. VR counselors and school personnel (along with the other IEP team members) must agree on a coordinated set of activities needed for a successful transition program, which is based on each student's needs, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. This handbook will also provide a basic overview of the transition process to VR counselors and special education teachers. Hopefully the information presented will provide both entities with a greater understanding of transition planning, and in turn, lead to increased collaboration between and among all stakeholders interested in building and maintaining good lives for students with disabilities.



## **Special Education vs. Division of Rehabilitation Services**

<b>Special Education</b>	<b>VS.</b>	<b>Division of Rehabilitation Services</b>
1. Law - Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).		1. Law - Amendments of 1998 Rehabilitation Act.
2. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - official legal document.		2. Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) - document that states services.
3. Covers ages 3-21 or until regular high school diploma requirements are met.		3. Works with high school students and adults with disabilities until successful employment outcomes are achieved.
4. Regular school attendance and completion of assignments is expected.		4. Regular contact with VR counselor and response to correspondence is required. If in Project Skills, school attendance and meeting academic requirements are stressed.
5. Districts are required to identify students with disabilities through free assessment and the IEP process.		5. School staff should refer students to VR for services as part of transition services.
6. Students receive special education and related services to address needs based on identified disabilities.		6. There is no absolute entitlement for VR services. More restrictive eligibility criteria, possible waiting lists and uncertain funding play a part in individuals being able to obtain VR services.
7. Services include individually designed instruction modifications and accommodations based on the IEP.		7. The focus of all DRS services is to enable the individual to get and keep a quality job, based on the IPE.
8. Individual student's needs based on the IEP may be addressed by program support for school personnel.		8. The school and DRS will work together to ensure that all supports are provided for a successful employment experience.
9. Progress toward IEP goals is monitored and communicated to the parent(s) and/or the student.		9. Progress toward IPE goals is monitored by monthly progress reports from Project Skills coordinator in the school. Also, the student and VR counselor will meet to review the IPE at least annually.
10. Schools assist in connecting the student with community support agencies, if identified as a transition need according to the IEP.		10. VR counselors assist in connecting students with adult agencies for smooth transition from school to employment.

# What is Transition?

The completion of high school is the beginning of adult life. Entitlement to public education ends, and young people and their families are faced with many options and decisions about the future. The most common choices for the future are pursuing vocational training or further academic education, getting a job, and living independently.

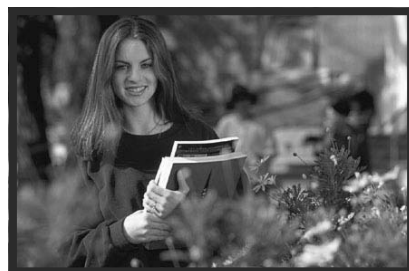
For students with disabilities, these choices may be more complicated and typically require considerable planning. In fact, transition planning is legally required to be in place when a student reaches 16 years of age, or younger, if appropriate. This transition planning becomes formalized as part of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP).

The term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- ◆ Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living or community participation [602(34)(A)]; and
- ◆ Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences and interests [602(34)(B)].

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 and then updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- ◆ Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and independent living skills, where appropriate;
- ◆ Transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals, including courses of study; and
- ◆ Beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under state law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under this title, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under Section 615(m) [614(d)(1)(A)VIII].



The district must give all graduating students and students reaching the age of 21, who are exiting special education, a summary of his/her academic achievement and functional performance, which includes recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his/her post-secondary goals.

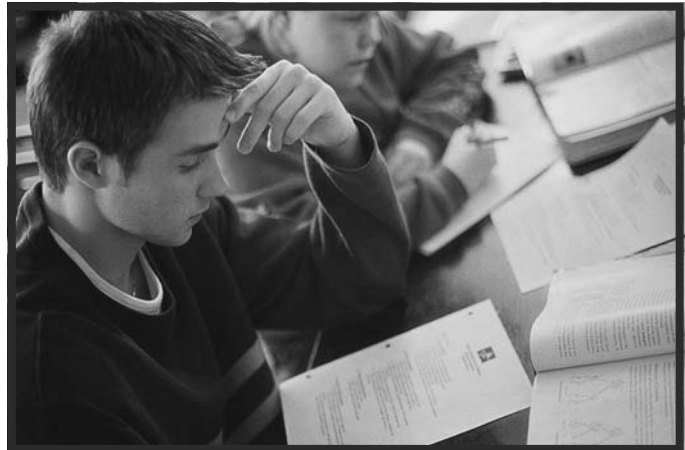
## **Transition Planning**

- ◆ Defines where a student would like to live, receive further training, and work after graduating from high school.
- ◆ Identifies the best ways to assist students to get there.
- ◆ Assists each student to reach the best possible outcomes.
- ◆ Helps students learn about their disability and how it affects them so they can become self-advocates!
- ◆ Teaches students how to understand their rights in the transition process, to access services effectively, and to make informed choices about their future.

## **Why Transition?**

Transition is the movement from one environment or stage in life to another. Transition is a change, and we have all experienced change in our lives. If you think back to one of these changes in your life, you can probably remember the feelings of anxiety and fear of the unknown, or the unexpected. If you are a new Vocational Rehabilitation counselor or a new teacher, you are in the “transition” process right now.

Transition and transition planning is difficult for all students and is more complicated for students with disabilities. Far too many students with disabilities leave school lacking the academic, technical, and social skills necessary to find and maintain employment. Often the jobs that they do find are low paying and offer no health benefits. Identifying the challenges that students will face as adults and preparing them to meet these demands successfully requires careful transition planning and ongoing coordination of services from age 16, or earlier, if necessary.



Transition services on the IEP are designed and developed for high school students with disabilities to help them avoid the unexpected and prepare them for the ‘change’ into that big world out there!!

# **Transition Services Liaison Project**

The Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP) is a state initiated project sponsored through the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the offices of Special Education Programs (SEP), which contract with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC) for project management. The project coordinator is based in Pierre and coordinates the activities of three regionally-based Transition Liaisons. The coordinator works closely with the DRS and SEP at the state level. The three regionally based transition liaisons provide ongoing technical assistance to local level agencies and schools.

This project provides technical assistance and support needed by teaching and rehabilitation staff to carry out new federal mandates, and also provides technical assistance and training to students, families, and other agencies seeking information on transition planning. Activities provided by the transition liaisons can include:

- ☛ Training to students, families, schools, VR counselors, and adult service agencies on transition and development of transition plans;
- ☛ Identifying and obtaining instructional materials and assistance with implementation of self-determination curriculum;
- ☛ Assisting with identification of local resources;
- ☛ Developing interagency councils to address regional transition service needs;
- ☛ Providing individual support and assistance.

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# What is Special Education?

Special education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of children who have disabilities. This is done at no cost to the parents. Special education can include special instruction in the classroom, at home, in hospitals or institutions, or in other settings.

Over 5 million children ages 6 through 21 receive special education and related services each year in the United States. Each of these children receives instruction that is specially designed:

- ♦ to meet the child's unique needs (that result from having a disability); and,
- ♦ to help the child learn the information and skills that other children are learning.



When a child receives special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), he or she must have an Individual Education Program (IEP). This is a written document listing, among other things, the special educational services that the child will receive. The IEP is developed by a team that includes the child's parents and school staff. The IEP is an extremely important document in the educational lives of students with disabilities receiving special education under IDEIA. IDEIA guides how states and school districts provide special education and related services to more than 6 million eligible children with disabilities.

Certain children with disabilities are eligible for special education and related services. The IDEIA provides a definition of a "child with a disability." This law lists 13 different disability categories under which a child may be found eligible for special education and related services. These categories are:

- ♦ Autism
- ♦ Deafness
- ♦ Deaf-blindness
- ♦ Hearing impairment
- ♦ Mental retardation
- ♦ Multiple disabilities
- ♦ Orthopedic impairment
- ♦ Other health impairment
- ♦ Serious emotional disturbance
- ♦ Specific learning disability
- ♦ Speech or language impairment
- ♦ Traumatic brain injury
- ♦ Visual impairment, including blindness.

## The Transition IEP Plan

The student's high school program should thoroughly prepare him or her for achieving the desired post-school goals and promote the movement from school to post-school environments and activities. **The Individual Education Program (IEP)** is the legal document reflecting the commitment made by the school to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) designed to meet the unique needs of the student with a disability. The IEP is similar to the IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment) used by Vocational Rehabilitation, and it needs to be developed, reviewed, and revised (at least) on an annual basis.

In order to assist with effective transition planning and address the transition requirements of the IEP, the team must develop a child's transition plan and have it in place by the age of 16 or younger, if determined appropriate. Planning for the future should be integral to the discussions and decisions within the entire IEP and should drive the IEP meeting! Transition should not be an add-on to the IEP document, or something that is casually mentioned at the end of the IEP meeting.

The IEP team's mandate is to first assist the child in setting post-school goals for employment, education, and independent living, and then to construct and implement a coordinated plan that will help the child to progress from current levels of academic and functional performance towards the realization of the post-school goals.

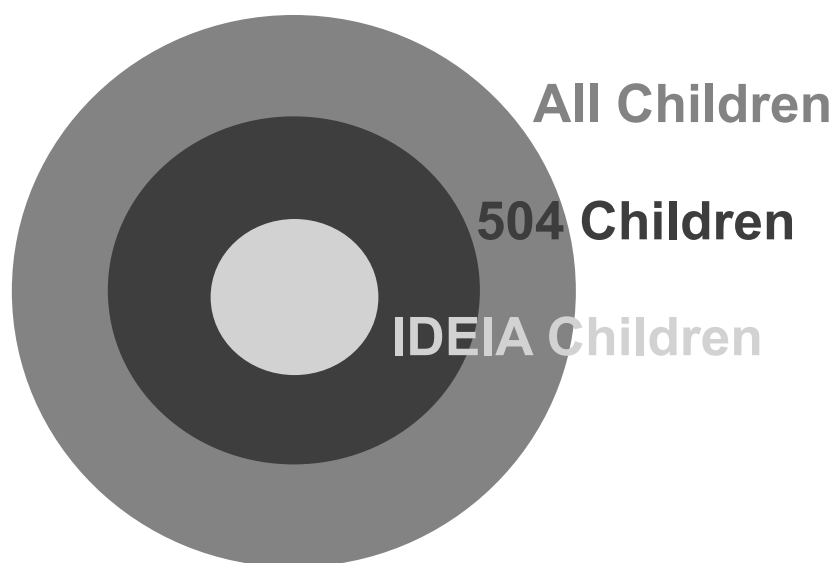


All of the components of the IEP – that is, assessment, present levels of academic and functional performance, course of study, transition activities, least restrictive environment, related services, participation in general education, and annual goals and objectives - need to be interrelated and should prepare students to work, live, and participate in their community as independently as possible.

The coordinated set of activities in the student's IEP, to be addressed prior to the student turning 16 years old, needs to be designed within a results-oriented process, which is based on the student's needs, taking into account their strengths, preferences, and interests. Members of the IEP team need to take a longitudinal view of where the student would like to end up and then build an IEP that will help them get there. Only then can the IEP be a more useful, meaningful, and dynamic tool to help ensure the student's post-school success and transition into the adult world.

## Comparing Section 504 & IDEIA

	<b><u>SECTION 504</u></b>	<b><u>IDEIA</u> <u>SPECIAL EDUCATION -</u></b>
<b>TYPE</b>	A Civil Rights Act	An Education Act
<b>FUNDING</b>	State & local responsibility (no federal funding)	Federal/state/local funding
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>	Section 504 Coordinator	Special Education Director
<b>SERVICE TOOL</b>	Accommodations and/or services	Individual Education Program
<b>DISABILITIES</b>	Much broader definition, students must have a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more of life's major activities	13 qualifying disabilities as stated in federal law
<b>PARENTS</b>	Should be involved in all meetings	Should be involved in all meetings
<b>PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS</b>	Notice to parents is required	Parent consent and notice required for initial evaluation and placement
<b>EVALUATION &amp; ELIGIBILITY</b>	An evaluation is necessary before it can be determined if a child is eligible for Section 504 services.	An evaluation is necessary before it can be determined if a child is eligible for special education services.



**All IDEIA students are covered by Section 504, but not all Section 504 students are eligible for services under IDEIA.**

# **IDEIA Reauthorized Statute** **Regarding Secondary Transition**

The reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA) was signed into law on December 3, 2004, by President George W. Bush. The provisions of the act went into effect on July 1, 2005, with the exception of some elements of the definition of “highly qualified teacher” that took effect upon the signing of the act. This document addresses only the changes to provisions regarding transition services of IDEIA that took effect on July 1, 2005. It does not address any changes that may be made by the final regulations.

## **IDEIA 2004:**

### **1. Changes in the purpose of IDEIA: by adding “further education.”**

The purpose of IDEIA is to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living [602(d)(1)(A)].

### **2. Change in language.**

In Section 602(34) the language in IDEIA is changed from “student” to “child.”

### **3. Changes to definition of “transition services.”**

The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- ♦ is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living or community participation [602(34)(A)]; and
- ♦ is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences and interests [602(34)(B)].

### **4. Changes in performance goals and indicators.**

Address graduation rates and dropout rates, as well as such factors as the state may determine [612(a)(15)(A)(iii)].

### **5. Procedures for reevaluations.**

A local educational agency (LEA) must ensure that a reevaluation for each child with a disability is conducted in accordance with Sections 614(b) and 614(c) if:

- ♦ the LEA determines that the educational or related services needs, including improved academic achievement and functional performance, of the child warrant a reevaluation; or
- ♦ the child’s parents or teacher requests a reevaluation.

However, a reevaluation shall occur not more frequently than once a year, unless the parent and the LEA agree otherwise; and at least once every three years, unless the parent and the LEA agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary [614(a)(2)].

## **6. Exception to requirements for evaluation before a change in eligibility.**

An evaluation is not required before the termination of a child's eligibility if the termination of eligibility is:

- ♦ Due to graduation from secondary school with a regular high school diploma; or
- ♦ Because the child exceeds the age of eligibility for a free and appropriate public education under state law.

For a child whose eligibility under IDEIA terminates under circumstances described above, an LEA must provide the child with a summary of his or her academic achievement and functional performance, including recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting post-secondary goals [614(c)(5)(B)].

## **7. Changes to definition of an Individual Education Program (IEP).**

- ♦ IEPs are required to include:
  - a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, that meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in, and make progress in, the general education curriculum; and that meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability [614(d)(1)(A)(i)(II)];
- ♦ IEPs are required to include:
  - a description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured; and
  - a description of when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals will be provided to the parents. Reporting may include quarterly reports, or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards [614(d)(1)(A)(i)(III)].
- ♦ Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 and then updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:
  - appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and independent living skills, where appropriate;
  - transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals, including courses of study; and
  - beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under state law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under this title, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under Section 615(m) [614(d)(1)(A)VIII].

## **8. Rule of construction.**

Nothing in Section 614 shall be construed to require (1) that additional information be included in a child's IEP beyond what is explicitly required in Section 614 or (2) require the IEP team to include information under one component of a child's IEP that is already contained under another component of such IEP [614(d)(1)(A)(ii)].

## **9. Added specific requirements to development of an IEP.**

In developing each child's IEP, the IEP team, subject to Subparagraph (C), shall consider the academic, developmental, and functional needs of the child [614(d)(3)(A) (iv)].

## **Participation in IEP Meetings**

**The VR counselor should participate in transition IEP meetings by:**

- ♦ Providing information about services and eligibility criteria for community or adult services and supports (i.e., college support services and financial aid, vocational rehabilitation services, family services, Social Security work incentives, etc.).
- ♦ Helping to explain the differences between the entitlement of school programs and eligibility of adult services.
- ♦ Assisting the team in assessing the possible need for continued school support for students ages 18 to 21.
- ♦ Assisting the team in identifying community or adult services that may assist the student in achieving his or her post-school goals.
- ♦ Providing information about Project Skills.
- ♦ Assisting the student and his or her family in the application processes for supports and services at colleges, training institutions, or adult services, as appropriate.
- ♦ Alerting families and school staff of potential waiting lists for services.
- ♦ Providing services, when appropriate, to the student prior to exiting the school system. This may mean through the Project Skills program, assistive technology (equipment), and various training, mentor, and apprenticeship programs that lead toward competitive employment or post-secondary education.



# **Graduation**

## **Graduation of Students Receiving Special Education under IDEIA**

High school graduation is a change in placement for a student with disabilities. Eligibility for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) ends when the district grants a regular high school diploma. Graduation fulfills the school district's obligation to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE).



Parents must be informed through the IEP process at least one year in advance of the intent to graduate their child upon completion of the IEP and to terminate services by graduation.

Before a student receives a diploma, the IEP team must meet to review the IEP to assure:

- ♦ the school district's graduation requirements will be met, or
- ♦ the student's measurable annual goals will be substantially completed, and
- ♦ new measurable annual goals are not needed for the coming school year.

If the IEP team determines that the student has met the school district's graduation requirements, or substantially completed the measurable annual goals and does not need new measurable annual goals, then the IEP team would not develop a new IEP and the youth would graduate. At this time, the school district needs to provide the student with a summary of his/her academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his/her post-secondary goals.

If the IEP team determines that the student will not meet the district's graduation requirements, or substantially complete the measurable annual goals, and will need new measurable annual goals for the coming school year, then the IEP team must develop a new IEP for the next school year.

## **Unsigned vs. Signed High School Diploma**

If a student decides to graduate with a signed diploma, the school district will no longer be involved with any services or funding for the student.

If a student graduates with an unsigned diploma, he or she can continue to receive services until the 30<sup>th</sup> day of June which follows his/her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

## **Transfer of Rights to Students at Age of Majority**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) mandates the transfer of educational decision-making rights to students at the age of majority, which is 18 in South Dakota. Prior to the student reaching age 17, the IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of the upcoming transfer of rights at age 18. All of the education rights previously provided to the parents will transfer to the student.

The educational rights that transfer to the student at age 18 include:

- ♦ The right to receive notice of, attend, and participate in IEP meetings.
- ♦ The right to give consent to evaluate or for change in their educational placement.
- ♦ The right to review educational records.
- ♦ The right to request mediation or a due process hearing

**At age 18, students with disabilities have the right to make their own decision about their education program, unless guardianship has been established.**





# Guardianship

Everyone, including a person with a disability, is presumed under the law to be a competent adult upon reaching age 18. This is true regardless of the severity of the person's particular disability. In other words, the law assumes that an individual upon turning eighteen years of age is capable of making important decisions that will have a direct impact on his or her life.

If a person's activities raise the question regarding his or her ability to make decisions or the decisions a person makes regarding health, care and safety are not appropriate, a court can review the situation. If the court, after looking at the person's abilities and capacities, determines that assistance is needed, it can appoint the person's parent, or another appropriate individual as the person's guardian and/or conservator. The person for whom a guardianship and/or conservatorship is granted is called a protected person. A guardianship is intended to assist individuals in making decisions regarding their lives, for example, in educational choices, living arrangements, employment, and medical concerns. A conservatorship is intended to assist individuals with money, finances, and property issues. A guardianship can be designed to meet the unique needs of the individual, for example it can cover only educational decisions, or another life area such as living arrangements. If a guardianship is awarded that covers educational decisions, the guardian will make decisions on behalf of the protected person as part of the IEP team. Seeking a guardianship/conservatorship is a legal process that requires a court hearing. Persons wishing to be appointed would be advised to seek the assistance of an attorney to help prepare for the proceedings. The request to be appointed is done by filing a petition in the Circuit Court of the county where the person needing assistance resides. A guardian and/or conservator is responsible for acting in the best interests of the protected person.

Only the court can make the final decision whether or not an individual needs the assistance of a guardian/conservator and to what areas and extent that assistance is given. It is important to remember that under a guardianship/conservatorship the protected person retains all rights not diminished by the court and has the right to make all decisions that have not been specifically given to the person who was appointed.

It is also important to note that there are alternatives to guardianship. For example, sometimes a guardianship/conservatorship is not necessary if alternate arrangements are safe and appropriate. Alternative arrangements can include creating a dual signature requirement on a checking account, having a durable power of attorney, or by establishing a representative payee for receipt of Social Security or SSI benefits.

Laws pertaining to guardianship and conservatorship are very state specific. Under South Dakota law, the appointment of a guardian and/or conservatorship for an individual does not constitute a general finding of incompetence, unless the court so orders.

**For state laws and additional questions you may have regarding guardianship or conservatorship contact: South Dakota Advocacy Services, 221 S. Central Ave, Pierre, SD, 57501 (605) 224-8294 or the South Dakota Guardianship Program, 105 East Capital, Pierre, SD, 57501 (605) 224-9647.**

# **Special Education Teachers talk to VR Counselors**

The following are comments from Special Education teachers and describe what that they would like Vocational Rehabilitation counselors to know:

- ♦ The IEP can be amended anytime, but must be developed, reviewed, and revised at least annually.
- ♦ No longer does a meeting need to be held to amend an IEP. Changes may be made by mutual agreement between the special education teacher and the parent/guardian.
- ♦ Keep in mind sociological issues while working with students.
- ♦ It is important for VR counselors to be in attendance at the IEP by the time a student is 16 years old.
- ♦ The IEP is a legal document, and the school is committed to doing whatever is written on the document.
- ♦ VR should act as a consultant and assist the student/family in making informed choices based on assessments, experiences, and the student's dreams and aspirations.
- ♦ It would be helpful if there were regularly scheduled times for the VR counselor to be at the schools.
- ♦ School guidance counselors should be involved and informed during the IEP process.
- ♦ Schools now need to provide a Summary of Performance to the student when they exit, he/she graduates, or exceeds the age of eligibility for the school system special education services. This report will include a summary of academic achievement and functional performance, which will also include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his/her post-secondary goals.
- ♦ VR counselors and all IEP team members should address the student directly and ask him/her the questions or for data first (not the family or special education teacher). Although the student may not have the information, you are sending a message that the student is the one ultimately responsible for and in charge of his/her future.
- ♦ Make clear to all parties VR's obligations regarding confidentiality upon the age of majority.
- ♦ Sharing eligibility criteria with special education teachers/directors and guidance counselors on the VR system (eligibility and service provision) would be extremely helpful for school personnel.
- ♦ Encourage students to self-advocate when meeting with them.
- ♦ It would be helpful for the VR counselor to spend some time observing the student in the school setting before determining eligibility.
- ♦ Counseling and guidance concerning employment issues may be the most meaningful services the VR counselor can offer students.
- ♦ VR counselors are so important in helping the IEP team to identify services for the student!
- ♦ Thank you for all you do for students, families, and IEP teams!



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# VR Counselors Talk to Special Education Teachers

The following comments are from Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and describe what they would like Special Education teachers to know:

- ♦ Do not have students begin their Project Skills work experience until ALL of the paper work has been completed, signed, and authorized through the DRS office (when in doubt, please check with appropriate counselor).
- ♦ Make sure that your school has signed their contract with DRS prior to each school year. The Project Skills work experience cannot be carried out unless the school has completed the appropriate paper work with the state. (Please note: Some schools sign one year contracts, some schools sign two year contracts.)
- ♦ A copy of the student's Social Security card is mandatory in order to participate in Project Skills.
- ♦ A student on a "504 plan" does not necessarily meet the eligibility requirements for DRS services.
- ♦ A student on an IEP may not always qualify for DRS services.
- ♦ Schools must maintain primary responsibility for student training and assessment during the transition period.
- ♦ Talk realistically with students and parents about the student's post-secondary goals. Educators need to not limit a student's dreams but be cognizant of their strengths, needs, and interests. If goals seem unattainable, delve further into the reason for the student choosing that goal. It is possible a student may have an employment goal of being an airline pilot because they like being in an airport. By delving further, another occupation found in an airport may be a more realistic goal.
- ♦ VR is much more than Project Skills, which is decided on an individual basis. Project Skills is not "automatic" for every student we work with.
- ♦ Schools should refer students with disabilities to VR for services at age 16 or earlier, if necessary. VR counselors want to become involved with students by age 16.
- ♦ VR is not just a fiscal agent!
- ♦ VR is only for services related to, and necessary for, employment.
- ♦ When goals are clearly stated, it helps to guide the VR counselor to assist with a smooth transition.
- ♦ VR looks at broad reading, broad math, and written expression scores to determine eligibility for students with specific learning disabilities.
- ♦ VR is not an entitlement program, a student must be eligible in order to participate.
- ♦ VR has a responsibility and obligation to respond to the needs and desires of the student, as expressed by the student, not as interpreted by the family or the school.
- ♦ Referrals can come from all individuals in the school system, such as principals, general education teachers, nurses, and guidance counselors.
- ♦ There is no set criteria to determine eligibility for VR services. Because a student is being served through Special Education or on a "504 plan" does not automatically mean that they will be eligible for services. Some students on an IEP or 504 plan might not need VR services. However, some students with a disability whom aren't eligible for special education services or are not being serviced on a 504 plan, may be eligible for VR services.

## Youth Leadership Forum



The Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for students with disabilities is a unique career leadership training program for high school juniors and seniors to serve as delegates from their communities. Students with disabilities will cultivate leadership, citizenship, and social skills as a result of participating in this five-day event. The YLF is coordinated by the Transition Services Liaison Project.

### **Learning Objectives of YLF:**

- ♦ Identify self with pride as an individual.
- ♦ Access vital resources related to assistive technology, community support, and civil rights.
- ♦ Realize individual abilities, rights, and the obligation to pursue meaningful employment and to contribute to society.
- ♦ Outline personal leadership and community goals.

**Applications for YLF can be downloaded at [www.tsip.org](http://www.tsip.org).**

**For more information, contact the Transition Services Liaison Project Coordinator, 1-800-224-5336, a Regional Transition Liaison, or a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor.**



## Project Skills

Project Skills is a paid work experience program for high school students with disabilities in South Dakota. The program is a cooperative arrangement between the state vocational rehabilitation agencies and the local school districts.

Project Skills provides students the opportunity to learn different skills in a variety of job placements, with the assistance of a job coach.

Project Skills helps to build the student's work history and references, and ultimately can help students to move into different and better jobs as they mature and are ready to take on new challenges.

**For more information about the Project Skills Program, please contact the Transition Services Liaison Project, 221 S. Central Ave, Pierre, SD 57501 or call 1-800-224-5336 or the Regional Transition Liaison in your area.**

## Catch the Wave



Catch The Wave is a one-day conference designed specifically for high school students who have a disability and are considering post-secondary education (either college or technical institute). Students will learn about preparing for college life, securing appropriate accommodations, and developing self-advocacy and communication skills.

Highlights of the conference are panel discussions with individuals who have a disability and have experienced a post-secondary setting, as well as disability coordinators discussing entrance and eligibility requirements.

**For more information, contact the Transition Services Liaison Project Coordinator, 1-800-224-5336, a Regional Transition Liaison, or Vocational Rehabilitation counselor.**

## **Services Available from Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

### **Vocational Counseling:**

Throughout the process, a skilled counselor, knowledgeable about disability issues, will assist you in planning for the future and helping to resolve problems along the way.

### **Work Skills:**

In order for people to become employed, they must have the vocational skills needed by employers. If an individual lacks the needed skills, training may be provided on-the-job, through supported employment, at a vocational technical school, or at a college or university. Project Skills is a paid work experience program for students with disabilities to assist them in identifying their career plans.

### **Transition Services:**

There may be special services needed by high school students with disabilities to make the adjustment from school to employment. These may include Project Skills, Youth Leadership Forum, or Catch the Wave. (See the following pages for explanation of these events.)

### **Personal Support Services:**

Personal support services may be required by some individuals to meet unique employment and training needs. This may include sign language interpreters, readers, job coaches, personal attendants, or notetakers.

### **Job Site Accommodations:**

For some individuals, special equipment or changing the way the job is done will be necessary in order to meet the expectations of an employer. This may involve purchasing special equipment or redesigning a work area for an employee.

### **Medical Services:**

Medical services such as artificial limbs, hearing aids, wheelchairs, or corrective surgery may be needed before an individual can obtain work.

### **Job Placement:**

The focus of all services is to enable an individual to get and keep a quality job. VR counselors can hire a job developer to help the individual find a job in the work force.

### **Employer Services:**

Many employers have questions about how best to accommodate the needs of a worker with a disability. Free technical assistance is available to employers in our state.

## **Application Process for Rehabilitation Services**

Find the Division of Rehabilitation Services office that serves the county the individual lives in. To find the local office, either call 1-605-773-3195 or go to [www.state.sd.us/dhs/drs/VOC/REHAB/county-vr.htm](http://www.state.sd.us/dhs/drs/VOC/REHAB/county-vr.htm).

### **Step One**

Contact the local office and schedule a meeting to discuss available services and to complete an application. Local offices, addresses, and phone numbers can be found at the end of this handbook.

### **Step Two**

Gather information concerning the applicant's disability, education, and work history. Bringing this information to the meeting can speed up the process.

### **Step Three**

Once eligibility has been established, the consumer and VR counselor identify and agree on an employment goal.

### **Step Four**

Finally, the individual and VR counselor will develop a detailed plan of services available to help the person achieve that goal.

### **Step Five**

The time it takes for an individual to reach their employment goal depends upon the individual's needs. Remember that any person whose disability significantly interferes with getting or keeping a job, and who needs VR services to overcome these barriers to employment is probably eligible.



## What is Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)?

Vocational Rehabilitation is a program that provides individualized services to assist people with significant disabilities to get and keep jobs that are compatible with their disability.

## Who is eligible?

Any person whose disability significantly interferes with getting or keeping a job, and who needs VR services to overcome these barriers to employment is eligible for our program. If a student with a learning disability is referred for vocational rehabilitation services, additional assessments and checklists may need to be completed by the student, parents, and teachers to ensure that the diagnosed learning disability results in a substantial impediment to employment.

## How does VR Work?

During the application process a VR counselor will meet with you to begin assessing your disability, employment history, and your unique interest, strengths, and abilities. When the assessment is complete, you and your counselor will identify and agree on an employment goal. You and your counselor will develop a detailed plan of services to achieve that goal. The plan, known as an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), will outline who pays for each service. While there is no charge for VR services, some services are based upon your economic need and the availability of other sources of funding, such as health insurance, federal grants or benefits.

Frequently, eligibility for services is determined on the day of application. You can speed up the eligibility process by coming to the office with medical information concerning your disability. When documentation of the severity of your disability, or how it affects your ability to work is not apparent or readily available, additional time is needed to gather this information. The time it takes to reach your employment goal depends upon your individual needs.



# Transition Services Liaison Project

The Transition Services Liaison Project (TSLP) is a state initiated project sponsored through the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the offices of Special Education Programs (SEP), which contract with Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (BHSSC) for project management. The project coordinator is based in Pierre and coordinates the activities of three regionally-based Transition Liaisons. The coordinator works closely with the DRS and SEP at the state level. The three regionally based transition liaisons provide ongoing technical assistance to local level agencies and schools.

This project provides technical assistance and support needed by teaching and rehabilitation staff to carry out new federal mandates, and also provides technical assistance and training to students, families, and other agencies seeking information on transition planning. Activities provided by the transition liaisons can include:

- Training to students, families, schools, VR counselors, and adult service agencies on transition and development of transition plans;
- Identifying and obtaining instructional materials and assistance with implementation of self-determination curriculum;
- Assisting with identification of local resources;
- Developing interagency councils to address regional transition service needs;
- Providing individual support and assistance.

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## Transition Planning

- ◆ Defines where a student would like to live, receive further training, and work after graduating from high school.
- ◆ Identifies the best ways to assist students to get there.
- ◆ Assists each student to reach the best possible outcomes.
- ◆ Helps students learn about their disability and how it affects them so they can become self-advocates!
- ◆ Teaches students how to understand their rights in the transition process, to access services effectively, and to make informed choices about their future.

## Why Transition?

Transition is the movement from one environment or stage in life to another. Transition is a change, and we have all experienced change in our lives. If you think back to one of these changes in your life, you can probably remember the feelings of anxiety and fear of the unknown, or the unexpected. If you are a new Vocational Rehabilitation counselor or a new teacher, you are in the "transition" process right now.

Transition and transition planning is difficult for all students and is more complicated for students with disabilities. Far too many students with disabilities leave school lacking the academic, technical, and social skills necessary to find and maintain employment. Often the jobs that they do find are low paying and offer no health benefits. Identifying the challenges that students will face as adults and preparing them to meet these demands successfully requires careful transition planning and ongoing coordination of services from age 16, or earlier, if necessary.



Transition services on the IEP are designed and developed for high school students with disabilities to help them avoid the unexpected and prepare them for the 'change' into that big world out there!!

## What is Transition?

The completion of high school is the beginning of adult life. Entitlement to public education ends, and young people and their families are faced with many options and decisions about the future. The most common choices for the future are pursuing vocational training or further academic education, getting a job, and living independently.

For students with disabilities, these choices may be more complicated and typically require considerable planning. In fact, transition planning is legally required to be in place when a student reaches 16 years of age, or younger, if appropriate. This transition planning becomes formalized as part of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP).

The term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- ♦ is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living or community participation [602(34)(A)]; and

- ♦ is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences and interests [602(34)(B)].

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 and then updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- ♦ Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and independent living skills, where appropriate;

- ♦ Transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals, including courses of study; and



- ♦ Beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under state law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under this title, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under Section 615(m) [614(d)(1)(A)(VIII)].

The district must give all graduating students and students reaching the age of 21, who are exiting special education, a summary of his/her academic achievement and functional performance, which includes recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his/her post-secondary goals.

# **Special Education vs. Division of Rehabilitation Services**

## **Special Education**

1. Law - Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).	1. Law - Amendments of 1998 Rehabilitation Act.
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2. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - official legal document.	2. Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) - document that states services.
3. Covers ages 3-21 or until regular high school diploma requirements are met.	3. Works with high school students and adults with disabilities until successful employment outcomes are achieved.

4. Regular school attendance and completion of assignments is expected.	4. Regular contact with VR counselor and response to correspondence is required. If in Project Skills, school attendance and meeting academic requirements are stressed.
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5. Districts are required to identify students with disabilities through free assessment and the IEP process.	5. School staff should refer students to VR for services as part of transition services.
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6. Students receive special education and related services to address needs based on identified disabilities.	6. There is no absolute entitlement for VR services. More restrictive eligibility criteria, possible waiting lists and uncertain funding play a part in individuals being able to obtain VR services.
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7. Services include individually designed instruction modifications and accommodations based on the IEP.	7. The focus of all DRS services is to enable the individual to get and keep a quality job, based on the IPE.
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8. Individual student's needs based on the IEP may be addressed by program support for school personnel.	8. The school and DRS will work together to ensure that all supports are provided for a successful employment experience.
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9. Progress toward IEP goals is monitored and communicated to the parent(s) and/or the student.	9. Progress toward IPE goals is monitored by monthly progress reports from Project Skills coordinator in the school. Also, the student and VR counselor will meet to review the IPE at least annually.
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10. Schools assist in connecting the student with community support agencies, if identified as a transition need according to the IEP.	10. VR counselors assist in connecting students with adult agencies for smooth transition from school to employment.
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# Introduction

This booklet was created to help Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors and special education teachers to better understand each other's perspectives and roles. Both educators and Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) personnel strive to obtain the best possible outcomes for students with disabilities. The relationship between the two agencies (VR and school) is significant. VR counselors and school personnel (along with the other IEP team members) must agree on a coordinated set of activities needed for a successful transition program, which is based on each student's needs, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. This handbook will also provide a basic overview of the transition process to VR counselors and special education teachers. Hopefully the information presented will provide both entities with a greater understanding of transition planning, and in turn, lead to increased collaboration between and among all stakeholders interested in building and maintaining good lives for students with disabilities.



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Transition Services Liaison Project

What Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors  
Want Special Education Teachers to Know

